



STATE OF WASHINGTON
WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF HEALTH
1102 SE Quince Street • PO Box 47990
Olympia, Washington 98504-7990

December 10, 2002

To: Washington State Board of Health Members
From: Tom Locke, Board Member
**RE: STATUS REPORT ON ACCESS TO CRITICAL HEALTH SERVICES,
PHASE II (2001-2003)**

Background and Summary

The Board identified “access to critical health services” as a priority for Washington State in 2000 and agreed to define access for use within the Public Health Improvement Partnership’s (PHIP) *Public Health Standards for Washington State* and for broader state health policy purposes. That work was completed in 2001, and the *Menu of Recommended Critical Health Services for Washington State Residents* (the *Menu*) was published. After determining that the collection of one-time, statewide data on access to the *Menu*’s services was not feasible, the Board decided to promote use of the *Menu* by public purchasers and by local health jurisdictions in the context of the PHIP’s standards. The *Status Report on Access to Critical Health Services, Phase II (2001-2003)* is a progress report on the Board’s work plan to accomplish those goals.

Access to health care remains inadequate for many Washington residents due to gaps in insurance coverage, a rise in the number of uninsured, and erosion of the health-care provider safety net. Double-digit increases in health-care costs continue to overwhelm private employers, insurers, and public budget writers. They have responded to these challenges with cuts in provider reimbursements, reductions in coverage comprehensiveness, and a shift toward consumer-driven health care. These trends in health-care financing will likely lead to further access problems for Washington’s residents.

Despite completion of many of the tasks in the Phase II work plan, implementation of service program examples, and development of policy initiatives in state government that are consistent with the *Menu*, the *Menu* itself has not been widely adopted by state purchasing and regulatory agencies. This report discusses the continued efforts of the Board of Health to ensure that all Washington residents have access to critical health services. This report also provides a detailed analysis of the context within which these efforts take place and guides recommendations for further efforts to improve access on several levels.

Recommended Board Action

The Board should approve the Status Report on Access to Critical Health Services and authorize its distribution.